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PVC-Op 161-Excavation Report

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Site 161

Site 161 is located along the crest of a low river terrace that trends northeast-southwest, paralleling the course of the Rio Cacaupala to the north. It is about 100m south and across the Rio Cacaupala from Site 120. The settlement consisted in 2004 of eight standing structures and two concentrations of rocks, the latter probably marking the former locations of buildings that have been severely disrupted. Stones were also recorded scattered over the river terrace's summit for approximately 27m southwest of Site 161's preserved constructions. These rocks may have derived from buildings that were so thoroughly damaged that their remains no longer form distinct clusters of stones. Overall, the buildings comprising Site 161 encompass ca. 4,675m². Structures 161-1 through -7 define a patio that covers approximately 35m northeast-southwest by 7.5m northwest-southeast. Structure 161-8, a very small (5x5m on its basal dimensions) lies southwest of the plaza while the two rock clusters are 15m southeast of that enclosed space. Access to the patio was easiest from the southeast as here the spacing between the bordering edifices was the widest (15m across). The land on which these edifices were erected is relatively flat though Strs. 161-3, 4, and 8 are set atop terrain that ascends northwest-to-southeast up and over the face of the river terrace. Structure 161-2, in turn, is set on land that rises northeast-to-southwest.

Research at Site 161 was pursued from May 17-26, 2004, all of the investigations directed by L. Ellison and C. Webber. During this period, 83m² were cleared in the course of investigating Strs. 161-1 and 161-2.

Structure 161-1

Structure 161-1 is the sole building recorded on the southeast flank of Site 161's patio. It is about 15m southeast of Str. 161-7, the same distance southwest of Str. 161-2, and 5.5m southeast and across the plaza from Str. 161-4. Digging here in Subop. 161D, E, F, G, H, I, J, L, and N uncovered 56m², excavations being pursued to a maximum depth of 0.58m below modern ground surface within architecture. One major building phase was identified for Str. 161-1 along with a previously unrecognized edifice (Str. 161-Sub1) lying southeast of the former construction. These excavations were directed by L. Ellison.

Time Spans

Time Span	Construction Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Dates
1	-	-	S.4	-	
2	-	-	S.3, 5	-	
3	Str. 161-1-1 st Str. 161-Sub1 Str. 161-4-1 st	U.1-5, 11 U.6-10, 15 U.12	-	-	
4	Str. 161-1-1 st Str. 161-sub1	U.13-14 U.13-14	-	-	

	Str. 161-4-1 st	U.13-14		
5	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1

Time Span 1

The earliest activity recorded in excavations within Str. 161-1st's environs was the deposition of at least 0.31m of a hard-compacted, fine-textured, very dark gray-brown clay (10YR 3/2; S.4). This layer's base was not encountered. Stratum 4 was revealed underlying Str. 161-Sub1's fill where it rises 0.3m over the 0.91m it was exposed running southeast-to-northwest. It may be that Strs. 161-1st and 161-Sub1 were built on a low rise the contours of which were briefly and incompletely glimpsed in the exposed portion of S.4. The absence of cultural material from S.4 very tentatively implies that there was no significant human occupation in the immediate area when this soil was being laid down.

Time Span 2

Overlying S.4 is 0.03-0.11m of a very dark gray (7.5YR 3/1) clayey loam (S.3) that contains cultural material. Stratum 3 follows the southeast-to-northwest ascent of S.4, rising 0.18m over 0.91m in this direction. Stratum 3's thickness declines as it is traced up this slope. At a distance of 1.6m northwest of where S.3 was found blanketing S.4 the former soil is replaced by a similar clayey loam (S.5) that is distinguished by its dark gray-brown (2.5Y 3/2) hue. Stratum 5 contains artifacts and is at least 0.17m thick (its base was not revealed). In this area between Strs. 161-1st and 161-Sub1, S.3 maintains a level upper surface for at least 1.18m. At a point 0.09m southeast of U.12, Str. 161-4-1st's southeast basal facing, S.5 was recorded emerging from the base of excavation and climbing 0.19m across the 0.53m it was traced running northwest-to-southeast. In this instance, S.3 was found covering S.5 by 0.14-0.23m, following the same upward northwest-to-southeast ascent.

The close similarities between S.3 and 5 suggest that they are parts of the same deposit. If that is the case, then their discontinuous exposures (separated by 1.6m and 8.3m) imply that they are parts of a low (0.18-0.19m-high) rise that is comprised of cultural materials laid atop a pre-existing equally low eminence (S.4). That rise would have measured about 13m northwest-southeast. The artifacts retrieved from S.3 and 5 point to a human occupation on this spot when these layers were forming. Whether S.3 and 5 were purposefully introduced to raise the terrain atop which Strs. 161-1st and 161-Sub1 would be built we cannot say.

Time Span 3

Structure 161-1st: Structure 161-1st was, during this interval, composed of a core platform that was aligned ca. 330 degrees, measured 3.53x4.4m, and was defined on all sides by vertical facings (U.1-4) that ascend 0.4-0.48m to the summit. The latter space is divided into two compartments arranged in a southwest-northeast line by the construction of a 0.25m-tall by 0.35m-wide wall (U.5) that spans the full northwest-southeast length of the summit. Unit 5 does not run a straight course. At a point 1.2m northwest of its intersection with the southeast basal facing (U.2), U.5 runs for 0.4m at an angle of ca. 302 degrees before resuming its course (oriented roughly 330 degrees) to join U.1, the building's

northwest basal wall. The southwest space created by the erection of U.5 covers ca. 3.5m² while the summit northeast of U.5 encompasses 3.1m². No signs of built-in furniture such as benches or shelves, were recorded in these spaces. A 0.1m-high terrace (U.11) fronts, and projects 0.62m southeast of, Str. 161-1st. This terrace expanded Str. 161-1st's basal dimensions to 4.15m northwest-southeast. Unit 11 extends 0.05m into the underlying S.5; U.2, the platform's southeast basal wall, projects 0.08m into that same soil. Not enough of Str. 161-1st's southeast face was dug at sufficient depths to determine if U.11 ran the full length of the platform nor are could we tell if other terraces fronted Str. 161-1st on its remaining flanks.

Structure 161-Sub1 is 1.85-3.05m southeast of Str. 161-1-1st whereas Str. 161-4-1st lies 5.64m to the northwest.

Structure 161-Sub1: Structure 161-Sub1 is another platform, this one measuring 4.3x4.85m, oriented approximately 72 degrees, and bounded by stone facings (U.6-9) that rise 0.25m to the summit. The platform's northeast basal facing (U.8) extends 2.15m northwest from the edifice's east corner at which point the wall cants out for 0.3m at an angle of ca. 25 degrees. After this change in direction, U.8 returns to its orientation of roughly 72 degrees, continuing to Str. 161-Sub1's north corner. Structure 161-Sub1's superstructure consists of two enclosures arranged in a southwest-northeast line and separated by a 0.3m-tall by 0.3m-wide stone wall (U.10) that extends the full northwest-southeast length of the summit. Unit 10 runs straight, parallel with the platform's northeast and southwest basal walls (U.8 and 9) for 2.3m northwest of its junction with U.7, the southeast basal facing. At this point it extends for 0.5m at an angle of ca. 25 degrees before resuming its course to join U.6, the northwest basal wall. This deviation matches the similar change in direction noted in U.8. The space southwest of U.10 covers 5.9m² while its analogue northeast of U.10 encompasses 5.2m². The fill (U.15) retained by U.6-9 consists of a black (7.5YR 2.5/1) clayey loam in which a few small to medium-size rocks are embedded. Unit 15 rides over S.3, creating a level earthen surface for Str. 161-Sub1's summit.

Structure 161-4-1st: This building is represented solely by what we interpret as the edifice's southeast basal facing (U.12). Unit 12 is 0.3m high and gives way to an earthen-floored summit or very extensive terrace surface (at least 4m northwest-southeast). We did not ascertain the dimensions of this building. From what we could determine of the edifice's orientation from our 1m-wide (northeast-southwest) exposure of U.12, it would seem to have been ca. 62 degrees.

All constructions raised now were fashioned of river cobbles set in a mud mortar. Unit 12 (Str. 161-4-1st) diverges somewhat from this pattern in that a few angular stones are intermixed with the far more numerous cobbles of which it is composed. Some care was taken to ensure that the flatter aspects of the rocks fronting all of the walls were directed outwards. The stones were set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 4

During this span as much as 0.3m of a black (7.5YR 2.5/1) clayey loam (U.14) was laid down between Strs. 161-1st and 161-Sub1 completely burying U.11. Capping U.14 is a stone pavement (U.13)

that envelopes the exposed edifices and encompasses roughly 7.5 northeast-southwest by 21m northwest-southeast (its northwest limits were not conclusively identified). Unit 13's margins were not clearly defined; they seem to line up, and be conterminous, with the southwest flanks of Strs. 161-1-1st and 161-Sub1, as well as with the southeast flank of the latter building. In general, U.13 seems to have been introduced to create a formal surface bordering Strs. 161-1st, 161-4-1st, and 161-Sub1 late in their use-lives. Unit 13 was fashioned primarily of a layer of river cobbles that is one stone thick. The stones are set in a mud mortar. Roughly 0.17m of U.2 (Str. 161-1st's southeast basal wall) still projected above this newly raised surface; it is likely that all of the facings pertaining to this building as well as Str. 161-Sub1 and 161-4-1st were also still visible. These changes reduced Str. 161-1-1st's basal dimensions to those of its core platform (3.53x4.4m). There is no evidence that the orientations or summits of Str. 161-1-1st and 161-Sub1 were changed at this time.

Time Span 5

Following the abandonment of Strs. 161-4-1st, 161-Sub1, and 161-1-1st, as much as 0.2m of a black (7.5YR 2.5/1) clayey loam (S.1) was laid down. Stratum 1 is distinguished from S.2 by the greater concentration of small roots in the former. Embedded in S.1 is a light scattering of rocks (F.1) that likely fell from final-phase architecture.

Structure 161-2

Structure 161-2 defines the northeast side of the patio. It was mapped as 15m northeast of Str. 161-1 and 1.5m southeast of Str. 161-3; the southeast corner of the latter nearly touches Str. 161-2's northwest corner as these were originally recorded on ground surface. The terrain here rises 0.2m over 7.6m northeast-to-southwest and 0.2m across 9m southeast-to-northwest. Digging on and around Str. 161-2 with Subop. 161B, C, K, and M uncovered ca. 27m² under the direction of C. Webber. Excavations were continued to maximum depths of 0.99m and 0.4m below modern ground surface beyond and within architecture, respectively. One major building phase was identified in the course of this work.

Time Spans

Time Span	Construction Phase	Units	Strata	Features	Dates
1	-	-	S.3, 4	-	
2	-	-	S.2	-	
3	Str. 161-2-1 st	U.1-12	-	-	
4	Str. 161-2-1 st Str. 161-Sub2 Str. 161-Sub3	U.13 U.14 U.15	-	-	

5	Str. 162-2-1 st	-	-	F.2, 3
6	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1

Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in Str. 161-2-1st's vicinity is the deposition of S.3 and 4. The former is a hard-compacted, fine-textured, dark brown (7.5YR 3/2) culturally sterile clay. Stratum 3 was exposed to maximum thickness of 0.04m immediately southeast of Str. 161-2-1st's southeast basal wall (U.3) and to a maximum thickness of 0.34m northeast of that structure's northeast basal facing (U.2). In the former case S.3 was traced over 1m northwest-southeast across which distance it maintained a level upper surface. Northeast of Str. 162-2-1st, S.3 was followed for 2.37m over which distance it climbed 0.29m from northeast to southwest. Adjoining the northeast exposure of S.3 is a fine-textured, reddish-brown (5YR 3/2) clay (S.4) that also lacks cultural materials in its exposed portions. Stratum 4 was traced for 1.4m northeast from its junction with S.3 at which point digging ceased. This layer was revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.1m and rose 0.1m across its exposed extent from northeast to southwest. The tops of S.3 and 4 comprise a continuous, gradual upward slope from northeast to southwest. The bases of S.3 and 4 were not encountered in our excavations.

Time Span 2

Approximately 0.37m of a hard-compacted very dark gray-brown (10YR 3/2) soil (S.2) blankets S.3 off Str. 161-2-1st's southeast flank at this time. Stratum 2 contains artifacts and, in its southeast exposure at least, is mottled with small white flecks. It is hard to say how much of S.2 was laid down now as its deposition seemingly resumed following Str. 161-2-1st's abandonment (T.S.6). The estimate of its thickness offered here is based on the vertical disposition of stones fallen from construction (F.1) after the building had been allowed to deteriorate. Stratum 2 was exposed off all of Str. 161-2-1st's remaining sides save the northeast where no such earth was found overlying S.3 and 4. Why this should have been the case is unclear though it may relate to the introduction of F.2 here during TS.5. The latter's construction might have resulted in the removal or at least severe disruption of S.2 where it originally covered S.3 and 4. The bases of S.2 were not identified northwest and southwest of Str. 161-2-1st.

Time Span 3

Structure 161-2-1st was, by the close of TS.3, a platform that was bordered on all sides by vertical stone facings (U.1-4) that rise 0.32-0.61m. The northeast basal wall (U.2) climbs directly to the top of the superstructure's (Room 1) northeast foundation (included in U.2), thus accounting for its greater height when compared to U.1, 3, and 4. Unit 1 on the northwest stands 0.32m tall and gives way to a 1.57m-wide area of apparently open summit space that terminates in the Room 1's northwestern footing (U.8). The latter rises 0.53m above the surface backing U.1. The southwest basal wall (U.4) is fronted by a 0.34m-high riser (U.5) that projects 0.67m southwest of U.4. It is unclear if U.5 originally ran the full length of the platform's southwest flank as we only cleared a 1m-wide (northwest-southeast) segment of the riser near the building's center. Unit 4 stands 0.11m above U.5's tread and

runs 0.91m to the northeast where it is succeeded by U.6. The latter is a 0.25m-tall riser that provides a step-up to the summit. Unit 7, Room 1's southwest foundation, stands 0.35m above the 1.44m-wide segment of the summit that backs U.6 to the northeast.

Unit 6 apparently corners with U.11 to form the summit's south corner. Unit 11 continues for 2.85m northeast from its junction with U.6 at which point it joins with U.12. The latter spans the 1.03m separating U.11 and U.10, Room 1's southeast foundation. Unit 12 rests atop and rises 0.38m above the summit surface backing U.3, the 0.45m-high southeast basal wall. Stretching for an estimated 2.85m northeast of U.12 is a stone floor (U.9) that fills the 2m between U.3 and 10 northeast of U.12 (this space is glossed as Room 2). Units 6, 11, and 12, therefore, appear to have formed a continuous construction that fronts Str. 161-2-1st on the southwest (U.6) and part of the southeast (U.11), U.12 delimiting the southwest flank of Room 2. That stone-floored enclosure's northwest margin is bounded by U.10, Room 1's southeast footing, while the remaining northeast and southeast flanks were apparently left open. Unit 10 rises 0.4m above Room 2's U.9 floor.

Room 1 lies immediately northwest of Room 2 and is bordered by stone foundations (U.2, 7, 8, and 10) that rise 0.33 and 0.4m above its earthen floor on the southwest (U.7) and southeast (U.10); the remaining footings (U.2 on the northeast and U.8 on the northwest) seem to have been flush with the enclosure's floor. These footings are 0.72-0.84m wide. The inferred level of Room 1's floor is 0.06m and 0.4m above the summit level on the southwest and northwest, respectively, and equal with it on the southeast. The enclosure's interior measures 2.97x3.37m and, within the exposed portions, lacks built-in furniture.

By the conclusion of TS.3, Str. 161-2-1st was a stone-faced platform that stood 0.61-0.85m tall, measured 7.64x8.47m, and was aligned ca. 336 degrees. The edifice's northeast basal facing rises directly to the level of the superstructure's Room 1, leaving no open space atop the summit between it and that enclosure. On the northwest, an area of open summit space measuring 1.57m across northwest-southeast borders Room 1. We are unclear if the northwest summit was partitioned into enclosures as we only cleared a 1-m wide trench across this space. Access to the summit apparently was from the southwest where the building was ascended by two stone-faced risers that are 0.34m and 0.11m high by 0.64m and 0.91m wide and give way on the northeast to a 0.24m-tall step-up to the summit. A 1.44m-wide segment of the summit borders Room 1 on this side. The superstructure is composed of two adjoining enclosures. The aforementioned Room 1 has an earthen-floored interior that encompasses 10m² and may have lacked built-in furniture. The stone foundations that delimit Room 1 are flush with its floor on the northeast and northwest, rise above that 0.33 and 0.4m above that surface on the southwest and southeast, and are 0.72-0.84m wide. Room 2 adjoins Room 1's southeast flank where its stone-paved interior encompasses 5.7m². Room 2's northwest and southwest flank are bordered by walls that rise 0.38-0.4m above this floor while the remaining sides look to have been left open. The enclosure's northwest margin is bordered by Room 1's southeast footing. There is no evidence of how, or if, passage between these compartments might have been effected. At present, it looks as if Room 1 was accessed by passing up and over the three risers fronting the building's southwest side while Room 2 was likely reached by passing up and over the Str. 161-2-1st's southeast basal wall (0.45m high). All constructions raised now were fashioned primarily of river

cobbles that are set in a mud mortar. The flatter aspects of the rocks forming the exterior faces of walls were generally directed outwards.

Time Span 4

Structure 161-2-1st retained its basic form, dimensions, and orientation during TS.3. The major change made to the building at this time was the erection of 0.25m-high riser (U.13) set on, and 0.18m back from the southwest edge of, U.4, the platform's southwest basal wall. The introduction of U.13 replaced U.6 as the summit step-up, enlarging the portion of the summit bordering Room 1 on this side to 2.16m across northeast-southwest. The risers ascending the platform's southwest face now measure, from bottom to top, 0.34m tall by 0.64m wide (U.5), 0.11m high by 0.18m wide (the still visible parts of U.4), and a 0.25m high step-up to the summit (U.13). We are uncertain how this change in the southwest summit riser related to earlier continuations of U.6 to the southeast (U.11 and 12).

In addition to this minor modification that was visited on Str. 161-2-1st, two apparent surface-level buildings were erected off the edifice's northwest and southwest flanks (Strs. 161-Sub2 and –Sub3). Structure 161-Sub2 is represented by a 0.12m-high by 0.42m-wide stone wall (U.14) that is 0.35-0.7m northwest of Str. 161-2-1st's northwest basal wall (U.1). The 1m-long segment of U.14 that was exposed is aligned roughly 273 degrees and was likely the southern foundation for an earthen-floored building that was raised directly on ancient ground surface. Unit 15, the one portion of Str. 161-Sub3 that was uncovered, is a 0.32m-high by 0.32m-wide stone wall that is 0.34m southwest of Str. 161-2-1st (measured from U.5). As with U.14, U.15 is probably a stone foundation that, in this instance, delimited the northeast side of an earthen-floored building that was raised directly on ancient ground level. The 1m-long segment of the wall was aligned approximately 339 degrees. We cannot, with the evidence in hand, infer the dimensions or forms of either building. The constructions raised now were fabricated primarily of river cobbles set in a mud mortar. There is less evidence, as opposed to TS.3, that the facing rocks were chosen for their flat aspects or that these faces were consistently oriented outwards.

Time Span 5

Structure 161-2-1st, along with Strs. 161-Sub2 and –Sub 3, were likely abandoned either at the conclusion of TS.4 or early in TS.5. It was during the latter period that sizable numbers of small to large cobbles were packed against the platform's northeast flank (U.2) and, possibly, the northwest side of Room 1 (set against that compartment's northwest foundation, U.8). In the first instance, the rocks (F.2) rest directly atop S.3 and 4, extending 2.62m northeast of U.2. Feature 2 is 0.19-0.4m thick, its preserved top dropping 0.44m from southwest to northeast over this distance. Unit 2 still would have projected 0.32m above the reconstructed top of F.2. There are some signs that U.2 had begun to collapse before F.2 was introduced, several of its uncovered stones bulging out to the northeast from the vertical line of the wall. Feature 3 is a 0.4m-thick deposit of stones piled up against U.8 and extending northwest of it for 1.11m. All but 0.16m of U.8 would have been obscured by the introduction of F.3. There was no evidence that U.8 was in the process of collapsing before F.3 was added. No purposefully-laid stones were deposited over Strs. 161-Sub2 and 161-Sub3.

The rocks comprising F.3 are fewer in number, and less densely packed, than was the case with those constituting F.2. In both cases, however, the stones, especially the larger examples, are mostly cobbles and are flat-laid, embedded in a brown soil. Features 2 and 3 may have been fill for additions to Str. 161-2-1st that were never completed. That lack of completion is suggested by the absence of formalized facings that would have retained this presumed fill. Alternatively, the F.2 and 3 rocks might have been introduced to conceal at least portions of Str. 161-2-1st from view, formally terminating the building or those elements of it that were covered by the rocks.

Time Span 6

After Str. 161-2-1st was abandoned, an additional ca. 0.25m of S.2 might have been laid down. As much as 0.49m of a fine-textured, very dark gray (2.5Y 3/1) soil (S.1) blankets S.2 and covers all but the uppermost parts of construction. Embedded in S.1 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks (F.1) that likely derived from final-phase architecture supplemented by stones dislodged from F.2 and 3.